

Advocates for Stony Creek Valley in Central Pennsylvania gain 10,000th signature in their petition drive

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Volunteers for the Stony Creek Valley Coalition have gotten their 10,000th signature on a petition to keep the wilderness valley “wild, scenic and freely accessible to the people of Pennsylvania,” according to Mike Kneasel, a co-chairman with the coalition.

That signature – from Gary Shaffer, of Halifax – came during last Saturday’s annual Ned Smith Center for Nature and Art Festival in Millersburg’s MYO Park.

The coalition’s trademark, green-and-white, WWW.SAVESTONYCREEKVALLEY.COM bus has been a regular sight at such events throughout Central Pennsylvania for many years.

Some variation of the coalition has been working to bring full protection to Stony Creek Valley, which lies just 14 miles north of Harrisburg and stretches through parts of Dauphin and Lebanon counties, since 1974, when then-PP&L proposed damming the creek to flood the valley to generate electricity. The valley is part of the Pennsylvania Game Commission’s State Game Lands 211.

More recently the Pennsylvania National Guard at Fort Indiantown Gap in northern Lebanon County, just south of Stony Creek Valley, proposed a land-swap with the commission to gain seasonal control of a small part of the valley for 90 days each year as a buffer zone for a new multi-purpose training range at FIG.

Although the state Department of Military and Veterans Affairs officially killed the plan about two years ago, the new momentum that the issue brought to the coalition has continued.

“We want to keep the awareness there,” explained Kneasel. “If something were to occur, we’d have the backlog of people. It needs to be saved every day, for future generations. We continue always to keep that vigilance going.”

Like many of the coalition volunteers, Kneasel’s dedication to Stony Creek Valley is deep and long-standing.

He explained, “My parents took me into the railroad bed (which once held track the length of the valley) when I was a boy. I might have been six years old.

“When I found out that Fort Indiantown Gap was going to try to take that land, I said, ‘That can’t happen.’”

As the 10,000th petition signer, Shaffer was given one of the coalition’s commemorate Stony Creek Valley prints by artist Tom Power.